This paper will examine intertextual references between the Dialogus of Tacitus and the letters of Pliny, in particular those regarding boar hunting. It will argue that there are clues in the letters of Pliny which can help us to understand the relationship between these two writers as well as the tone and purpose of the Dialogus. By studying Pliny’s letters to Tacitus on hunting (1.6, 9.10), one can see the specific reference to boars as an allusion to Marcus Aper, the chief spokesperson for contemporary eloquence in the dialogue, indicating a degree of humor and irony in the Dialogus that is further displayed by the similarity of Pliny’s opening exhortation in Epistle 1.6, ridebis et licet rideas, to the final words of the Dialogus, cum adrisissent, discersissimus. Moreover, the dialogue between Pliny and Tacitus in Pliny’s letters can be seen as an indication that the Dialogus itself may have been revised throughout the years, thus problematizing the debate about the “publication date” of the Dialogus.

Dear Sir

As you are a Friend to American Manufactures under proper restrictions, especially Manufactures of the domestic kind, I take the Liberty of sending you by the Post a Packett containing two Pieces of Homespun lately produced in this quarter by One who was honoured in his youth with some of your Attention and much of your kindness.

John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, January 1, 1812

In the quote above, it appears that the senior founding father is sending the Virginia statesman some of the fine wool for which Massachusetts had earned a reputation. The letters which follow upon the receipt of this “Homespun,” however, demonstrate otherwise. In fact, the “Homespun” in question was actually John Quincy Adams’ Lectures on Rhetoric and Oratory. I use this example of metaphor in correspondence as a launching point to propose the same practice in the letters of Pliny, and in particular with reference to Tacitus’ “Lectures on Rhetoric and Oratory,” the Dialogus. In this paper I hope to demonstrate (or at
least provoke further discussion regarding the matter) that there are previously overlooked or undervalued points of contact between these two works. By examining these points of contact, I believe we will gain a better understanding of the relationship between these two authors and shed some light on the problems surrounding the *Dialogus.*

While the debate regarding the authorship of the *Dialogus* has been virtually silenced by Lange’s recognition in the nineteenth century of a parallel between the *Dialogus* and a letter from Pliny to Tacitus, the *nemora et luci* of Ep. 9.10 and *Dialogus* 9.6, 12.1, the conversation regarding the interpretation of the *Dialogus* and its intent continues.¹ This linguistic similarity noted above has caused problems for many interpreters. Drawing upon the observations made by Borszák (1968: 431) regarding the two letters from Pliny to Tacitus in reference to boar hunting (1.6 and 9.10), the latter of which includes the reference cited above, and the name of the most problematic speaker of the dialogue, Marcus Aper, I would suggest that by examining not only the linguistic similarities, but also the thematic material of the dialogue, we can discover a yet unrealized tool for understanding this enigmatic work of Tacitus and the relationship between Pliny and its author. Ultimately I would argue that Pliny viewed his letters to Tacitus as a dialogue on the same subjects discussed in the *Dialogus* and that both texts should be seen as an open discussion on the problems facing men of letters in the era of Trajan.

THE DIALOGUE OF LETTERS

Before turning directly to the letters of Pliny and the *Dialogus,* let us examine the notion of the exchange of letters as a type of dialogue. Demetrius, citing Artemon on Aristotle, states, “both dialogues and letters ought to be written in the same manner” (*Eloc.* 223).² Nevertheless, Demetrius argues, the letter should not be a philosophical treatise (too bad for Seneca), but should provoke its reader to respond (231). In this respect, Pliny’s letters to Tacitus record a dialogue with Tacitus and his works, especially the *Dialogus.* As Walker points out, “The letters between Pliny and Tacitus concern chiefly literary subjects, above all the art of oratory” (1952: 164).

This is not the first attempt to examine the resemblances between the *Dialogus* and the writings of Pliny. Charles Murgia (1985) investigated references between the letters of Pliny and the *Dialogus,* following up on Bruère’s (1954) citation

¹. Lange 1832: 1–14. On the general history of the key debates concerning the *Dialogus,* see Bo 1993. It is interesting to note that those who dispute Tacitus’ authorship put forth Pliny or his teacher Quintilian, among others; see Bo 1993: 45. In this paper I have used Mynors’ OCT for Pliny’s letters and Mayer’s Cambridge edition for the *Dialogus.*

². ὅτι δὲ έν τῷ άυτῷ τρόπῳ διάλογον τε γράφειν καὶ ἐπιστολάς, εἶναι γὰρ τὴν ἐπιστολήν οἶνος τὸ ἔτερον μέρος τοῦ διάλογου. All translations are my own. For further discussion of this passage and its bearing on Ciceronian epistolography, see Leach 2006: 249–51.
of connections between the works of Tacitus and the *Panegyricus*. But both of these scholars concluded that the *Dialogus* must have influenced Pliny’s letters, having unnecessarily dismissed the hypothesis that Pliny may have influenced Tacitus in his composition and revision of the *Dialogus*. Murgia insists that the *Dialogus* was published, or at least known to Pliny, before he assembled his first book of letters, presumably in A.D. 97–98.

While I agree with Murgia that the *Dialogus* was originally known to Pliny before Pliny composed the first book of his letters, the nature of ancient publication complicates any conclusions which can be drawn from this inference. I would propose that, just as Pliny’s letters and the *Panegyricus* show signs of being influenced by the *Dialogus*, Tacitus, reading Pliny’s letters and speeches, made alterations to the *Dialogus*, which was finally “published” sometime around A.D. 107–108. Sherwin-White dates letter 9.10 to this time period, stating, “At most I.6 and IX.10 may suggest that the *Dialogus* was published between the dates of the two, since in I.6 Pliny originates the great ‘mot’” (1966: 488). The publication of Pliny’s letters and the final form of the *Dialogus* around this time period may be indicated by Pliny’s claim in Ep. 9.14 (cf. 7.20, 8.7) that his fame will be linked to that of Tacitus. Nor does this claim seem unwarranted, for it is Tacitus who had originally related the anecdote retold by Pliny in Ep. 9.23. When asked by a Roman knight whether he (Tacitus), was a Roman or provincial (*Italicus es an provincialis?*), he responded, “you know me from my writings” (*Nosti me, et quidem ex studiis*). To which the knight replied, “Oh, are you Tacitus or Pliny?” (*Tacitus es an Plinius?*) (9.23.2–3).

"PUBLICATION" IN ANCIENT ROME

Even if these assumptions cannot be proven (and admittedly they cannot), we must re-examine our attitudes towards publication in the ancient world. Several aspects of literary production in imperial Rome must be recognized in order for the arguments put forth above to make sense. The first of these is the subjection of unpublished works to revision through recitation among friends, as discussed by Florence Dupont (1998). In fact, the *Dialogus* itself is built around the fallout from a *recitatio* given by Maternus of his tragedy on Cato, as his friends visit the next day and encourage him to remove some troublesome passages.4 While Maternus’ friends are concerned with inflammatory content, they might just as easily have criticized his style or other aspects of his play. *Recitationes* could be given not only of plays, poetry, and history, the genres most frequently mentioned

3 The smart quotes here are used to indicate the difference between publication in modern terms, i.e. a printed edition, and the ancient process by which a work was made known to a wider reading public through release for copying or placement in a public library. See Starr 1987: 215 for this distinction.

4 Cf. also Aper’s criticism of the poetic *recitatio* at *Dial.* 9.4.
in this context, but even of speeches and dialogues. Suetonius states that among the cultural pursuits of Augustus, *recitantis et benigne et patienter audīt, nectantum carmina et historias, sed et orationes et dialogos* ("He listened kindly and patiently to recitations, not only of poetry and history, but also of orations and dialogues") (Aug. 89.3).⁵

Pliny likewise gives evidence that *recitationes* were venues for literary criticism for speeches as well as poetry, and that he himself took such criticism into account when revising his work.⁶ As Markus states in reference to Pliny’s defense of using *recitationes* to revise speeches previously delivered in court (in particular, *Ep*. 7.17), “Pliny’s claim for originality or for reviving an earlier practice indicates that speeches were not common in Rome’s recitation halls.... Pliny himself, who was trying to revive Pollio’s practice, is very conscious in his earlier letters (2.19, 3.18, 4.5) of the disadvantages of reciting speeches already delivered in court. He admits that his only goal is emendation and improvement of the final version before publication” (2000: 146). Pliny provides us with evidence of *recitationes* being used to revise one of the two genres mentioned by Suetonius as not typically being part of this practice. It thus seems entirely possible that the *Dialogus* could have been subjected to a *recitatio* (or more than one) and then revised before its final publication.⁷

In addition to the practice of the *recitatio* was the exchange of materials by two friends. Pliny explicitly states in his letters that works were criticized not only after the rough draft was finished, but even as they were being written. For example, in *Ep*. 3.10, Pliny writes to Vestricius Spurinna and Cottia regarding his eulogy of their son, *nunc quoque paulisper hesitavi, id solum, quod recitavi, mitterem exigentibus vobis, an adicerem quae in aliud volumen cogito reservare* ("Now also I hesitate a little, whether I should send to you, as you request, only that which I have recited, or whether I should add those things which I am thinking about reserving for another volume") (3.10.2). Pliny indicates that he is still working on the tribute and thus debates whether to send it in pieces or to wait until the entire thing is finished. In the end, he sends what he has, knowing that his friends will not make the work public until Pliny is finally ready to do so. Likewise at *Ep*. 4.20.1, Pliny writes to Novius Maximus that he has criticized his work, *ut quemque perlegeram*. He indicates that he had sent his views on each individual section separately and now will give his views on the work as a whole. Finally, in *Ep*. 8.4 to Caninius Rufus, Pliny asks that the poet send him each section of his new epic on Trajan’s Dacian War as soon as he finishes, *immo etiam ante quam absolvas, sicut erunt recentia et rudia et adhuc similia*

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⁵ I owe this citation to Markus 2000: 146.
⁷ Murgia 1985: 172 proposes the *Dialogus* could have been one of the works recited in the busy season of *recitationes*, April 97 (*Ep*. 1.13). Unfortunately, Pliny’s statement, *magnum proventum poetarum annus hic attulit*, specifies only poetry.
nascentibus ("indeed even before you finish, so that it will be recent and rough and still resembling something in its earliest stages") (8.4.6). These examples show that aside from the practice of recitationes, literary works could also be examined as finished rough drafts, or even as they were being written. Nor were the practices mutually exclusive. In Ep. 3.15 Pliny is asked by Silius Proculus to read a book of his poems, poems which Pliny had previously heard during a recitatio.

After a work had been criticized by friends, it could sit idle awaiting publication. In Ep. 9.1, Pliny exhorts Maximus to publish his speeches vel pro te vel in Plantam. Apparently the work had been floating around for some time, but the death of Planta prompts Pliny to encourage Maximus to hasten its publication. He tells Maximus, igitur si quid aliud in manibus, interim differ. hoc perfice, quod nobis qui legimus olim absolutum videtur ("Therefore, if you have anything in your hands, put it off for the time being. Finish this, which seems to those of us who have read it to have been finished long ago") (9.1.4). Pliny implies that it was not uncommon for an author to be working on several different projects at one time and laboring over certain works for many years.8

Indeed, even after a work was "published," there was nothing to stop an author from revising the work. As Starr puts it, “Since private copies were usually made in small numbers, an author could revise his work at any time” (1987: 219). Starr notes that two versions of one of Cicero’s treatises were known to Quintilian, while only the earlier version was known to Ammianus. Thus, these outlets of recitationes, editing through the exchange of editions, and revision after being made public allow us more wiggle room as we examine some of the correspondences between the Letters of Pliny and the Dialogus.

THE DATES OF PLOINE’S LETTERS AND THE DIALOGUS

As we turn our attention towards the relationship between the Dialogus and the works of Pliny, I should begin with a few prefatory remarks regarding the dating of the letters. Although most scholars admit that these letters were originally written as genuine correspondence and were then revised for publication at a slightly later date, there is no definitive answer. Scholars such as Sherwin-White (1966: 27–41) suggest that the books were published sequentially, beginning with Book 1 in A.D. 97 and ending with Book 9 in A.D. 108, although some of them may have been published in groups. Syme further connects the letters to Tacitus in Book 9 (9.10, 9.14) with the completion of the Histories, as well as Pliny’s increasing insecurity about his own literary legacy. He asserts, “Most estimates put the termination of the Historiae in or about the year 109. The season called for Pliny to round off and give to the world the final

8. Consider the average academic journal article as it makes its journey from conference paper to published product.
installment of an orator’s added contribution to parity of renown: in short, an autobiography disguised as a running comment on life and letters” (1985: 183). Murgia, among others, has disputed this dating of Pliny’s letters, yet he nonetheless concedes that the books are more or less chronologically arranged by date of composition. Whether or not they were published in their final form before A.D. 109 cannot be proven. It does seem reasonable, however, that any letters written to Tacitus would have been sent in some form at the time they were composed.

HUNTING FOR INTERTEXTUALITY

With the time frame for Pliny’s letters having been tentatively established, a closer examination of some of the passages which Murgia claims Pliny borrowed from Tacitus seems warranted. I propose that these instances of borrowing are more reciprocal than they might originally seem. The first of these comes from the letter mentioned above from Book 1, on boar hunting. The letter in its entirety reads as follows:

Ridebis, et licet rideas. Ego, ille quem nosti, apros tres et quidem pulcher-rimos, cepi. “Ipse?” inquis. Ipse; non tamen ut omnino ab inertia mea et quiete discederem. Ad retia sedebam; erat in proximo non venabulum aut lancea, sed stilus et pugillares; meditabam aliquid enotabamque, ut si manus vacuas, plenas tamen ceras reportarem. Non est quod contemnas hoc studendi genus; mirum est ut animus agitatione motuque corporis excitetur; iam undique silvae et solitudo ipsumque illud silentium quod venationi datur, magna cogitationis incitamenta sunt. Proinde cum venabere, licebit auctore me ut panarium et lagunculam sic etiam pugillares feras: experieris non Dianam magis montibus quam Minervam inerrare. Vale.

Pliny Ep. 1.6—to Tacitus

You will laugh, and you have my permission to laugh. I myself, whom you know, have caught three boars, indeed the most beautiful boars. “You yourself?” you might say. Yes, I myself; yet, however, I did not relinquish altogether my inactivity and rest. I was sitting by my nets; there was nearby neither spear nor lance, but rather a pen and writing tablets; I was thinking about something and writing it down, so that, if I came home empty-handed, nevertheless, I would bring back full notebooks. You should not scorn this kind of pursuit; it is a wondrous thing how the mind is stirred up by the agitation and movement of the body; indeed, the surrounding forests, the solitude, and the silence itself that is granted to hunting are great incitements to thought. Accordingly, when you go hunting in the future, on my authority, you should bring your writing tablets along with your lunch basket and flask; you will find that Minerva wanders in these mountains no less than Diana. Farewell.
Cf. Dial. 36.1 (Maternus speaking)

magna eloquentia, sicut flamma, materia alitur et motibus excitatur et urendo clarescit.

Great oratory, like a flame, is fed by its material and is fanned by movements, and it brightens in burning.

Aside from the parallels cited above to Dial. 9.6 and 12.1, Murgia, elaborating on the work of Brüère, sees an allusion to Dial. 36.1, the phrase motibus excitatur, which Pliny “lifts” as motu excitetur. According to Murgia (1985: 175), “Pliny’s statement needs a recognition of some antecedent to gain full meaning and does in fact gain in clarity if it is recognized as an allusion to Dial. 36.1, while Dial. 36.1 has nothing to gain from recognition of Pliny Ep. 1.6.2 as its antecedent.” While the phrase motuque corporis excitetur makes perfect sense if Pliny is discussing the stimulation of the mind brought on by physical activity, as Brink observed, “the two writers ... seem to be saying not only different things but, it appears, opposite things.” He considered the similarities to be “parallels rather than direct influences” (1994: 260). More importantly, the motus described by Pliny are physical exercises, while those described by Tacitus are political disturbances (OLD motus 9). The motus of Tacitus are far more dangerous than those of Pliny. Or are they?

The passage also has some interesting ties to the Controversiae of Seneca. The reference most closely relates to a phrase from Ovid which Seneca examines. Brüère first noted this allusion, but as Brink pointed out, he failed to recognize its context in Seneca’s work. Brink further criticized Murgia for dismissing the notion that Tacitus may have been influenced by Seneca’s quotation of Ovid. At Contr. 2.2.8, Ovid is said to have borrowed a passage (Am. 1.2.11–12) from Porcius Latro. According to Seneca, memini Latronem in praefatione quadam dicere quod scholastici quasi carmen didicerunt: non vides ut immota fax torpeat, ut exagitata reddat ignes? (“I recall that, in a prefatory remark, Latro said something the schoolmen learned as a maxim: ‘Do you not see how a stagnant torch weakens, but when shaken renews its fires?’”). Brink cautiously concludes, “Here Latro’s (ut immota fax torpeat,) ut exagitata reddat ignes is paralleled by Tacitus’ (flamma) motibus excitatur, and the latter may well be derived from the former, though certainty, as pointed out earlier, cannot be hoped for” (1994: 263). That Seneca refers to the saying as a scholastic dictum makes even more of an impact. Indeed, this notion of oratory as a flame is also found in Pliny’s Ep. 4.9, although Pliny does not use the same language as Seneca and Tacitus.9 Seneca also makes reference to the importance of exercise in keeping up one’s strength as an orator.

9. Ut enim faces ignem adsidua concussione custodiunt, dimissum aegerrime reparant, sic et dicentes calor et audientis intentio continuatone servatur, intercapedine et quasi remissione languescit (4.9.11). Likewise Maternus describes the turbulent attacks of the Republic, stating, quas oratoribus faces admovebant (40.1).
At Contr. Pref. 15, he states, *excitatur enim otio vigor*. Thus both the idea of rhetoric as a flame with violent possibilities, which Tacitus references, as well as Pliny’s mention of physical exercise and leisure as necessary for keeping one’s mind fit, find antecedents in Seneca’s work on the development of rhetoric in his time.

In order then to discover what boar hunting has to do with rhetorical treatises, let us look a little more closely at the letter itself. First of all, the letter opens with an incitement to laughter. Pliny begins the letter by telling Tacitus, *ridebis, et licet rideas* (1.6.1). It should be mentioned that the final words of the *Dialogus* are *cum adrisissent, discessimus* (Dial. 42.2). Although Tacitus was himself present at the historical setting of the dialogue, he does not participate in the laughter. Pliny’s invitation and permission to laugh seem all the more relevant if viewed in this light. For, indeed, while the idea of ending a dialogue on a humorous note may not be novel, Pliny’s humor regarding man-killing beasts is. Why would Tacitus be invited to laugh about his friend almost getting killed?

**HUNTING AND THE ROMAN ARISTOCRAT**

In order to understand the importance of this letter and decode the meaning of the allusion to hunting, I believe it is necessary here to address the issue of hunting in the Roman world. The emperor Hadrian was notorious for his love of hunting wild beasts. More important for this study, however, is the fact that Hadrian first learned his love of the sport from his later adoptive father, the emperor Trajan, as Pliny well knew (*Pan.* 81). Hunting, indeed, was a popular sport among the Roman elite from the time of Scipio Aemilianus, and connected the nobility to their virtuous past. Recall Horace’s *Epode* 2, where he praises hunting, along with other aspects of rustic life, as one of the best ways of forgetting one’s troubles. The sport of hunting was inextricably linked to the virtues of the Roman Republic.

10. Note that the only first person verbs referencing Tacitus after the address to Fabius Justus are *intravimus* and *deprehendimus* in 3.1. Subsequently, Tacitus disappears from the narrative until the very last word. Hass-von Reitzenstein 1970: 96 sees this as evidence that Tacitus is distancing himself from the actual dialogue and the opinions of its participants. Mayer notes in his commentary *ad loc.*, “But Tacitus, silent to the last, did not even join in the laughter” (2001: 216). For more on the device of ending a dialogue with good humor, see Gudeman 1914: 510.

11. On Hadrian as hunter, see especially Dio 69.10.2; cf. 69.11.1: “He was so skillful in the hunt that he once took down a boar with one blow” (*οὔτω δὲ περὶ τὴν θήραν ἐπιδέκεισις ἕν ὡς καὶ μέγαν ποτὲ σὺν μιᾷ πληγῇ καθελείν*).

12. On Scipio Aemilianus as hunter, see Polybius 31.29.3–12. The most important work on hunting in the ancient world is Aymard’s *Essai sur le chasses romaines* (1951). More recently, J. K. Anderson’s *Hunting in the Ancient World* (1985) and Carin Green’s article, “Did the Romans Hunt?” (1996) have addressed the topic.

13. Horace extols, among other things, driving *apros in obstantes plagas* (*Epod.* 2.32).
More important than the social capital to be gained from hunting, however, is the connection between hunting and rhetoric. Xenophon’s treatise on hunting, the *Cynegetica*, explores the world of hunting in its entirety. Aside from advice on what sort of dogs or horses to use when hunting deer, rabbits, or boars, Xenophon also explains the benefits of hunting in the education of the young. In concluding his essay, he explains how hunting helps men prepare for war. His defense of the old-fashioned training leads him to rebuke those who criticize hunting. This in turn leads to a tirade against the new attitudes regarding the training of the young. What started out as a treatise on hunting ends as a reprimand of the sophists. He compares hunters to sophists saying, “The one group attacks wild animals, the other their friends” (ἔρχονται δὲ οἱ µὲν ἐπὶ τὰ θηρία, οἱ δ’ ἐπὶ τοὺς φίλους φύλαξ) (13.12.1).

Thus, trying to be a good Roman, Pliny, in his typical fashion of combining sport with studia, has “accidentally” caught three boars, or *apri*. Why boars? And why is Pliny sitting down on the job and writing in his notebook? Doesn’t he know that boars are dangerous? Hasn’t he heard of Adonis? Boars are man-killers. As his great-uncle wrote in his discussion of animal teeth, *apri percutiant* (*N.H.* 11.61). Even if Pliny is attended by slaves who are manning the nets, he seems rather cavalier. In reading the letter, anyone with an interest in literary studies and techniques in hunting might smell a metaphor. Woolf has noted regarding this letter, “The letter sets up hunting and literary activity as conventional opposites, and then, by familiar appropriations, makes the hunting expedition serve literary ends, both this letter and the acts of composition and reflection it describes. The choice of Tacitus, portrayed here as a keener hunter than Pliny, as addressee also indicates an awareness that these tastes were often combined” (2003: 214).

Although Pliny has demonstrated in letters to other correspondents besides Tacitus that he likes to combine hunting with studying, *those* letters do not indicate anything particularly humorous or out of the ordinary. Let us quickly examine these other letters in order to establish that the tone of his letter to Tacitus is unique and meant to be understood in a certain way.

The first of these letters (2.8) is addressed to Caninius Rufus. Pliny opens the letter by asking, *studes an piscaris an venaris an simul omnia?* (“Are you studying, fishing, or hunting, or doing all three at once?”). Just as Pliny had done in letter 1.9, Caninius is urged to do all three on the banks of Lake Como. There is no indication that Caninius takes this advice, nor is there any indication that Pliny finds anything particularly amusing about combining hunting and studying. In *Epistle* 5.6, the famous laudation of Pliny’s Tuscan villa, Pliny tells Domitius Apollinaris, *ibi animo, ibi corpore maxime valeo. Nam studiis animum, venatu corpus exerceto* (“There I am especially well in mind and body, for I exercise my mind with study and my body with hunting”) (5.6.46). Once again, the practice is something Pliny exhorts with no indication of humor or irony. In *Epistle* 5.18 to Calpurnius Macer, Pliny writes, *ego in Tuscis et venor et studeo, quae interdum*
alternis, interdum simul facio; nec tamen adhuc possum pronuntiare, utrum sit
difficultius capere aliud an scribere (“I am in Tuscany, both hunting and studying,
which I do sometimes in turn, sometimes at the same time; nevertheless, I’m not
able to decide whether it is more difficult to catch something or write it”) (5.18.2).
Here Pliny does seem to be making light of a bad situation. More importantly, this
letter alludes to the same issue faced by Pliny in Ep. 9.10, where the shortage
of writing material is paralleled by the shortage of game.

A short missive to Pomponius Mamilianus (9.16) also addresses the subject
of hunting and studying. In this letter, Pliny states that he is too busy to hunt.
However, he is not busy studying but rather attending to commercial business,
namely the harvesting of his grapes. nobis venari nec vacat nec libet: non
vacat quia vindemiae in manibus, non libet quia exiguae. Devehimus tamen pro
novo musto novos versiculos tibique iucundissime exigenti ut primum videbuntur
defervisse mittamus (“For me there is neither time nor desire to hunt; no time
because the grape harvest is in my hands, and no desire because it is a bad one.
Nevertheless, I am bringing in some new little verses instead of new wine, and, to
you asking most pleasantly, I will send these, as soon as they have fermented”) (9.16.1–2). Interestingly, however, the grapes are not so great, so instead of wine,
Pliny promises verse.14 This would seem to indicate that when Pliny is studying
while hunting, he is not necessarily writing verse. If that is the case, it sheds
light on the interpretation of the letter to Tacitus which succeeds this letter, Ep.
9.10, where Pliny experiences a shortage of boars, as well as being unable to
write. More importantly, that letter contains the reference to nemora et luci which
corresponds to the Dialogus and Tacitus’ advice that the forests and groves are
ideal for writing verse.

The final letter to mention hunting, aside from those addressed to Tacitus,
is to Fuscus Salinator. In Ep. 9.36, Pliny once again mentions life at his Tuscan
villa. Part of his routine includes hunting and studying. venor aliquando, sed
non sine pugillaribus, ut quamvis nihil ceperim non nihil referam (“Sometimes
I go hunting, but not without my notebooks so that I shall bring home something,
even if I catch nothing”) (9.36.6). This letter echoes distinctly the conversation
between Pliny and Tacitus. The context however does not seem to reference any
particular occasion, nor does it mention the game involved. In all of the other
letters in which Pliny advises a friend on the benefits of hunting and studying
as the ultimate workout for the body and mind, nowhere does he mention specific
animals which are to be hunted. Thus we may return to the question with which
we began this digression—why boars?

One possible explanation is that Pliny is referencing the Dialogus. Not only
is Aper the name of the most adversarial interlocutor in the Dialogus, but also,
excluding a possible but unlikely speech from Secundus in the lacuna, there are

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14. Epp. 8.15 and 9.20 likewise compare the grape harvest with literary production.
three main speakers in the dialogue, engaging in three pairs of set speeches. I would go even further to suggest that Aper may have had a lost speech in the lacuna, or perhaps one included in the original draft of the Dialogus but subsequently excised by Tacitus before publication; in that case three boars would refer to three speeches by Marcus Aper. This may be mere conjecture, but it is a tempting explanation for the otherwise ridiculous situation Pliny claims to have found himself in while hunting.

HUNTING AND LITERARY PRODUCTION

As mentioned earlier, Ep. 1.6 is not the only letter in which Pliny discusses hunting with Tacitus. Ep. 9.10, the one containing the reference to nemora et luci which has spurred so much debate, is also a letter in which Pliny combines Minerva and Diana. This letter, however, seems to be a response to some reply by Tacitus to 1.6 and other subsequent letters. The letter reads as follows:

Cupio praeceptis tuis parere; sed aprorum tanta penuria est, ut Minervae et Dianae, quas ais pariter colendas, convenire non possit. Itaque Minervae tantum serviendum est, delicate tamen ut in secessu et aestate. In via plane non nulla leviora statimque delenda ea garrulitate qua sermones in vehiculo seruntur extendi. His quaedam addidi in villa, cum aliud non liberet. Itaque poemata quiescunt, quae tu inter nemora et lucos commodissime perfcit putas. Oratiunculam unam, alteram retractavi; quamquam id genus operis inamabile inamoenum, magisque laboribus ruris quam voluptatibus simile. Vale.

Pliny Ep. 9.10—to Tacitus

I desire to obey your precepts; but there is such a shortage of boars, that it is not possible to serve both Minerva and Diana, whom you say ought to be worshipped equally. Thus Minerva alone must be served, yet casually, as in a summer recess. While on the road I have sketched out some trifles and immediately erased them due to the long-windedness by which casual statements are composed in a carriage. To these I have added some more while at my villa, since there was nothing better to do. Thus the poems are now at rest, which you think are perfected most easily in the woods and groves. I have re-edited one or two shorter speeches, although this kind of work is thankless and disagreeable, more like the labors of the country than its pleasures. Farewell.

Pliny begins by claiming, cupio praeceptis tuis parere, an indication that through some means, Tacitus has provided him with advice which he should obey. But advice regarding what? Pliny continues by complaining about the shortage of

15. “The structure of the Dialogus—three pairs of speeches by three speakers, with Messala’s speech divided into two parts at 27—seems now to be generally agreed on,” as Gordon Williams notes (1978: 31 n. 65).
boars, with the result that he is not able to pay equal attention to Minerva and Diana, as Tacitus says he should. The suggestion of cultivating both Minerva and Diana was, of course, the suggestion Pliny made to Tacitus in 1.6. Pliny then says that he is cultivating Minerva, but only half-heartedly. Pliny gives the excuse, itaque Minervae tantum serviendum est, delicate tamen ut in secessu et aestate. But to anyone who has read Pliny’s letters, and presumably to his friend Tacitus, Pliny’s excuse is just that. Matthias Ludolph, in his study of “die Paradebriefen” of Pliny (Ep. 1.1–8), sees this letter as an example of “Selbstironie,” setting the tone for the perception of Pliny as a literary figure (1997: 94; cf. 167–72). Throughout the letters, both those addressed to Tacitus and others in the collection, Pliny has complained (despite his prolific output) about the shortage of material for oratorical eloquence.

Alongside his lazy cultivation of Minerva, a reference to his revision of old speeches, Pliny tells Tacitus he is writing poetry, quae tu inter nemora et lucos commodissime perfici putas. Hence, the letter seems to refer directly to a judgment made by Tacitus in some form which suggested nemora et luci were appropriate for poetry. Although this phrase may have been a commonplace in literary Latin, as Luce puts it, “It is precisely because of the use of this phrase by others (ut ipsi dicunt) that, when Pliny identifies it with Tacitus particularly, (quae tu...putas), something special must be meant: not a phrase thrown out in conversation, but, more probably, in a published work where the phrase stands out by emphatic use, as it surely does in the Dialogus” (1993: 14 n. 16).

The parallelism of these two letters did not elude Murgia, but instead of seeing them as an exchange between two authors who edited each other’s works, he infers that Pliny has consciously produced an inverted mirror image of the previous letter (1.6) for purely literary purposes (1985: 199). Pliny’s intention of producing his letters as a literary collection cannot be ignored, but the inversion of the conditions under which literature is produced warrants further investigation. Pliny’s shift from Book 1, where he is actively producing literature, as well as catching boars, to the drastic shortage of both hunting stock and material for oratory in Book 9 too closely parallels the underlying theme of the Dialogus to be dismissed. Indeed, Pliny is likewise unable to write poetry, connecting the shortage of boars not just with oratorical output, but with all literary production. Pliny’s literary productions from negotium (oratory), as well as the products of his otium (poetry), are both silenced.

By way of comparison, in a letter to Pomponius Mamilius (9.25), Pliny does some backtracking regarding his attitude towards poetry as a source of gloria for a man who has been active in public life. Whereas in previous letters, Pliny has been careful to distinguish the gloria of literary renown from the fama and laus of

16. As Lefèvre states in his study of these Jagd-Billette, “Es ist schließlich zu bedenken, daß der erste Brief für sich verständlich ist, nicht aber der zweite; ep. 9,10 lebt von dem Bezug auf ep. 1,6” (1978: 44).
general literary éclat, in this letter, Pliny indicates that his verses may also win him gloria. What is even more interesting about this letter, however, is Pliny’s use of animal metaphors to indicate literary genres. Pliny states, tu passerculis et columbulis nostris inter aquilas vestras dabis pennas, si tamen et tibi placebunt; si tantum sibi, continendos cavea nidove curabis (“If my little sparrows and doves please you, you will grant them flight among your eagles; and if they only please themselves, you will take care that they be locked in a cage or nest”) (9.25.3). While it is much easier to make the leap from sparrows and doves to lyric and elegiac poetry than it is to deduce boars as an allusion to a treatise on oratory, the metaphor does add some weight to the arguments regarding the tone of Pliny’s letters and their implied meanings.

**THE DISCUSSION OF ORATORY IN PLINY’S LETTERS AND THE DIALOGUS**

Ep. 1.20, addressed to Tacitus, contains the most direct evidence of this dialogue on oratory between Pliny and the author of the Dialogus. The letter opens with the musing, frequens mihi disputatio est cum quodam docto homine et perito, cui nihil aequum in causis agendis ut brevitas placet (“There is a frequent dispute for me with a certain learned and experienced man, for whom nothing is so pleasing in pleading cases as brevity”). Pliny then launches into his defense of his long-windedness, which turns into an analysis of the simple versus grand style of oratory. He defends superfluity in preference to brevity. He concludes that both sin equally, one by its weakness (imbecillitate), the other by its strength (viribus). After summing up his own ideas on the matter, Pliny tells Tacitus that he would change his views (mutabo), if Tacitus disagreed with them. If Tacitus does disagree, Pliny asks that he respond at length.

In the Dialogus, when Aper is defending his friends against their own hypothesis that rhetoric has fallen on dark days, he claims his friends moderate their style, using ea quotiens causa poscit ubertas, ea quotiens permittitur brevitas... (“such richness whenever the case seeks it, such brevity whenever it is permitted...”) (23.5). As Mayer has pointed out in his commentary on the passage, “this expression seems to recall a letter of Pliny to T. on the question of the desirability of brief speeches in court. Pliny says that a friend of his prefers it only si causa permittat (Ep. 1.20.2). T. himself arguably would have sided with Pliny’s friend.... Here quotiens permittitur suggests in general there is not much opportunity to exploit this manner, though, as Pliny makes clear in his letter

17. The discussion of these terms in Pliny would take us on quite an unnecessary digression. I refer the reader to Anderson 2002, in particular section 5.3.4.2. Anderson concludes, “If my arguments about gloria and this last letter [9.25] are correct, and if I am to read Ep. 9.25 in the context of the debate exemplified in the Dialogus, could it be possible that this letter is a partial response to Tacitus’ Aper and Maternus?” (2002: 246).
to T. on the subject, Regulus had favoured it, and so perhaps it was somewhat discredited” (2001: 165). Indeed, how would Tacitus, the master of brevitas, have felt about Pliny’s claim that brevitas was a tactic used by orators like Regulus? In this letter, Regulus is used as an example of the orator who cuts straight to the chase, telling Pliny, *tu omnia quae sunt in causa putas exsequenda; ego iugulum statim video, hunc premo* (“You think every point in a case must be pursued; I see the jugular and I grab it”) (*Ep.* 1.20.14).

Aper further argues that long speeches are a thing of the past, being outmoded for the tastes of modern audience:

> vidit namque, ut paulo ante dicebam, cum condicione temporum et diversitate aurium formam quoque ac speciem orationis esse mutandam. facile perferebat prior ille populus, ut imperitus et rudis, impeditissimarum orationum spatia atque id ipsum laudabat, si dicendo quis diem eximeret...nec mirum; erant enim haec nova et incognita...at hercule pervulgatis iam omnibus, cum vix in corona quisquam assistat quin elementis studiorum etsi non instructus, at certe imbutussit, novis et exquisitis eloquentiae itineribus opus est, per quae orator fastidium aurium effugiat, utique apud eos judices qui vi et potestate, non iure et legibus cognoscunt, nec accipiunt tempora sed constituant, nec exspectandum habent oratorem dum illi libeat de ipso negotio dicere, sed saepe ultimo admonent atque alio transgreidentem revocant et festinare se testantur...

19.2–5

For he [Cassius Severus] saw, as I was just saying, that the form and shape of oratory has to change in accord with the conditions of the times and the diversity of the audience. The populace before, as being inexperienced and rustic, easily preferred spans of the most unfettered oratory and considered it praiseworthy in itself if anyone should use up the whole day speaking.... And no wonder, for these things were then new and unfamiliar...but now, by Hercules, when everything has been made common knowledge, when scarcely anyone is present in the crowd who, even if he is not trained in the elements of oratory, has at least had a taste, there is need of new and refined types of eloquence, through which the orator might escape boring his listener, and so that before those judges who adjudicate by force and by power, not by right and by law, and who do not allow speakers to set the time, but rather set the time themselves, nor think they ought to wait for an orator to speak for as long as he pleases about a certain matter, but often spontaneously rebuke him and call him back when he is crossing over to another point and declare that he must hurry up....

Aper goes on to say that no modern audience would have the time or inclination to listen to the extensive speeches given by Cicero or Messalla.

Aper adds that judges are more than willing to interrupt speakers if they are not immediately grabbed (*invitatus et corruptus est*) by the speaker’s rhetoric.
Likewise, the crowd of people standing around listening will not stand for old-fashioned (and long-winded) oratory any more than they would stand for a revival of a play featuring Roscius or Turpio. Indeed, it is not the entire speech the audience craves, but the sententiae, the witticisms that can be quoted again later. And of course, Tacitus was a master of the use of sententiae. Thus, in the Dialogus, the use of brevity is not viewed as a stylistic choice, but as a necessity. Tacitus leaves Pliny, and the modern scholar, wondering about his views on long, intricate speeches.

Moreover, in the speech Maternus gives at the close of the Dialogus, discussing the fact that the change in oratorical style is due to political factors, he links the end of lengthy speeches with Pompey’s third consulship and the end of libertas. As he casually states:

transeo ad formam et consuetudinem veterum iudiciorum: quae etsi nunc aptior est veritati, eloquentiam tamen illud Forum exercebat in quo nemo intra paucissimas horas perorare cogebatur et liberae comprehensiones erant et modum dicendo sibi quisque sumebat et numeros neque dierum neque patronorum finiebatur. primus haec tertio consulatu Cn. Pompeius astrinxit imposuitque veluti frenos eloquentiae, ita tamen ut omnia in Foro, omnia legibus, omnia apud praetores gererentur.

I move on to the form and custom of the old tribunals: even if now the format is more fitting for finding out the truth, nevertheless, that Forum allowed for more eloquence, in which nobody was compelled to state his case within a few hours and recesses were more freely granted and each speaker placed a limit for himself on his own speaking and neither the number of days nor of advocates was limited. Pompey first, in his third consulship, restricted these things and fastened the reins on eloquence, so to speak; nevertheless, everything was still conducted in the Forum, by the laws, and before the praetors.

Maternus then notes the shift of criminal trials to the Centumviral court and claims Cicero, Caesar, Brutus, Caelius, and Calvus would not have been able to adapt to the style of speaking used in this court. Considering Pliny’s frequent appearances in this venue, this passage must have attracted his attention.

We know from other letters that Tacitus himself practiced oratory, delivering the eulogy of Verginius Rufus as consul in 97 (Ep. 2.1.6) and participating in the prosecution of Marius Priscus at the turn of the century (Ep. 2.11.2). Although Tacitus is known for his brevitas in writing history, beyond the mention in Pliny’s letters we are left with no indication as to the style or length of his

19. Pliny himself complains about time constraints, especially in Ep. 6.2.5–6. For more on this topic, see Gudeman 1914: 329.
speeches. Narrating the funeral of Verginius Rufus to Voconius Romanus, Pliny states, \textit{laudatus est a consule Cornelio Tacito; nam hic supremus felicitati eius cumulus accessit, laudator eloquentissimus} ("He was eulogized by the consul Cornelius Tacitus; for this final pinnacle was added to his good fortune, that he had the most eloquent eulogist") (2.1.6). \textit{Eloquentissimus} is the adjectival form of the same adverb Pliny uses to describe Tacitus’ speech in the action against Marius Priscus, when he says, \textit{respondit Cornelius Tacitus eloquentissime et, quod eximium orationi eius inest, σεµν/οµεγα/περισσοµενης} (“Cornelius Tacitus replied most eloquently and, as is characteristic of his oratory, with dignity") (2.11.17). Thus there is something about Tacitus’ speech, this time in a legal context, that makes it seem dignified. The term implies a style of oratory which is loftier. Cicero wrote to Atticus that he intended to publish his political speeches in imitation of Demosthenes, who published his \textit{Philippics}, "so that he might seem more dignified and statesmanlike” (\textit{ut σεµνότερός τις et πολιτικώτερος videretur}) (Cic. \textit{Att.} 2.1.3).\textsuperscript{21} If Tacitus’ style of oratory were more Ciceronian than his style of history, Pliny might well have been hard put to understand his friend’s position on brevity. The matter would have been further complicated by the arguments put forth in the \textit{Dialogus}.

APER AS A CHARACTER IN THE DIALOGUS

The advocate for modern eloquence in the dialogue is otherwise unknown to us and goes only by the name of Marcus Aper, perhaps the father of the Marcus Flavius Aper who is mentioned in Pliny’s letters (5.13).\textsuperscript{22} As Syme asserts, “None of the other interlocutors in the \textit{Dialogus} is delineated quite so vividly as Marcus Aper, or quite so fully; and none has a larger share of the discourse” (1958: 1.108). Aper is also the character most often associated with the humor employed in the \textit{Dialogus}. Thus I propose, following Borszák, that Pliny uses the name to reference the \textit{Dialogus} in his letters on hunting. To return to the arguments addressed at the beginning of this paper, boars are the only specific game mentioned by Pliny in the various letters he writes concerning hunting. And they are only mentioned in his letters to Tacitus. Perhaps Pliny was following in the footsteps of his friend Martial, who also plays on the connotations of the name Aper in several of his epigrams.\textsuperscript{23} Presumably Tacitus was also familiar with these epigrams.\textsuperscript{24}

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\textsuperscript{20} On Pliny’s views regarding the different styles for oratory and history, see Ep. 5.8.
\textsuperscript{21} On this point see Anderson 2002: 18.
\textsuperscript{23} \textit{Non cenat sine Apro noster, Tite, Caecilianus. bellum convivam Caecilianus habet.} (7.59)
\textsuperscript{24} See Syme 1958: 2.619 n. 1.
Aper has been written off by some scholars as a delator like Regulus, but recently he has been rehabilitated, especially by Goldberg (1999) and Champion (1994), as being more a Cicero for his times. When he comes to Cicero in his discussion of the progression of eloquence, Aper recognizes that by championing his contemporaries among his own friends he is assuming the same pose Cicero did: *illi enim antiques mirabantur, ipse suorum temporum eloquentiam anteponebat* (“For they [Cicero’s friends] admired the ancients, he [Cicero] preferred the eloquence of his own times”) (Dial. 22.1). 25 Despite those who claim that Aper is insincere in championing the moderns, acting as a devil’s advocate, Luce points out, “The last words of the *Dialogus* are given to him [Aper], and, though said in jest, they suggest that he is as prepared to defend modern oratory as ever” (1993: 18). 26

Moreover, as Champion points out, “Aper’s oratory militates against the view of his character as simply crude and utilitarian. First of all, his speeches maintain the neo-Ciceronian prose style of the entire work. Aper’s first speech unmistakably echoes Cicero’s oratorical works” (1994: 154). Aside from stylistic imitation, one could say that Aper has adapted his goals and methods to the age of Vespasian in the same way Cicero did to the end of the Republic. As Winterbottom has demonstrated, “This union of oratory with political advancement is not (*mutatis mutandis*) at all unlike the way in which Cicero had risen to fame and fortune during the Late Republic” (2001: 140). In fact, Aper’s name, meaning boar, could be seen as a reference not only to Pliny’s first letter to Tacitus, but also the famous *Verrines* of Cicero. Aper himself, following Quintilian (*Inst.* 6.3.55), pokes fun at Cicero’s punning on the name of the defendant by using synonyms for boar (*nolo irridere...ius verrinum*), which is precisely what Tacitus seems to be doing in this dialogue (Dial. 23.1).

As mentioned earlier, Pliny himself was heavily influenced by Cicero and considered him to be his model. 27 Aside from their admiration for Cicero, Pliny and Aper also share a concern for their fame and reputation. In fact, Mayer sees Pliny’s letters as an attempt to earn him immortality as an orator. Mayer writes, “So his hopes for them [the letters] would have to be as tempered as his hopes for his verse or even for his oratory. But oratory was still the ‘great game’ at Rome, serious, traditional, a public service; Aper in Tacitus’ *Dialogus* makes this point ably” (2003: 234). Indeed, in the *Dialogus*, Aper refers to the ability of oratory to secure for a man great fame, claiming, *quid? fama et laus cuius artis cum oratorum gloria comparanda est? qui illustriores sunt in Urbe non solum apud negotiosos et rebus intentos sed etiam apud [iuvenes et] adulescentes, quibus

25. Pliny is perhaps adopting this Ciceronian pose when he claims (with regard to a new comedy by Vergilius Romanus), *sum ex ipsis qui mirer antiques, non tamen (ut quidam) temporum nostrorum ingenia despicio* (“I am among those who admire ancient authors, but not to the extent that I (like some) look down upon the talent of our own times”) (Ep. 6.21.1).

26. The most significant treatment of Aper as devil’s advocate is that of Deuse 1975.

modo recta est indoles et bona spes sui? (“What art’s fame and praise can be compared with the glory of orators? Who is more illustrious in Rome, not only among men of business and public affairs, but even among the young men who have upright characters and good hopes for themselves?”) (7.3). This can be compared to Pliny’s assertion to Tacitus at Ep. 7.20.4, *equidem adulcens fulminus*, *cum iam tu fama gloriaque flores, te sequi, tibi “longo sed proximus intervallo” et esse et haberi concupiscia* (“Indeed, as a young man, when you were already flourishing in fame and glory, I followed you, and I desired to be and to be considered ‘closest by a long shot’”). Of course, the *fama gloriaque* earned by Tacitus in Pliny’s youth would have been due to his skill as an orator. Similarly, Pliny argues in Ep. 6.29 that among the chief reasons for taking a case—defending a friend, taking up a case no one else will take, or setting a noble precedent—is a fourth reason, fame. He defends his position by stating, *aequum est enim agere non numquam gloriae et famae, id est suam causam* (“for it is reasonable to plead a case sometimes for glory and fame, that is, to plead one’s own case”) (6.29.3).

**TACITUS’ LIBER AND PLINY’S RESPONSE**

According to letters 6.16 and 6.20, Tacitus had requested information regarding the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 A.D. This would indicate that around 106 Tacitus was engrossed in the *Histories*. The next letter addressed to Tacitus (7.20) indicates that Pliny had read his liber and had made notations and comments. Some have thought this to be the *Dialogus*. While Murgia concedes Sherwin-White (ad loc.) was probably correct in claiming the liber to be a book of the *Histories*, he is not entirely convinced. In Ep. 6.16 and 6.20, as well as 7.33, Pliny offers material for the *Histories*, which strongly suggests that Tacitus is still working on them. Murgia asserts, “Chronology indicates that the liber in question should belong to the *Histories*, while the detectable resemblances of diction are in some way tied to the *Dialogus*” (1985: 191). He attributes these similarities to possible repetitions by Tacitus of the *Dialogus* in his *Histories*, brought on by an obituary of a famous orator, perhaps even one of the participants in the *Dialogus*.

A closer inspection of 7.20.2 indicates not only that Tacitus has sent a book to Pliny, but that Pliny has sent a book to Tacitus as well (*nunc a te librum meum cum adnotationibus tuis expecto*). Sherwin-White (ad loc.) is silent as to the nature of this book, and Radice translates *librum meum* ambiguously as “my book.” While this could be a speech, could it not also be an edition of a collection of Pliny’s letters? If so, it must be recognized that Tacitus, having read a selection of Pliny’s letters in one sitting, perhaps even the earlier letters 1.6 and 1.20, may have been inspired to revise his treatise on oratory, touching upon the same themes Pliny is concerned with in these and other letters. For, as Mayer points out, “the letters, as a consciously shaped body of revised or newly composed correspondence, are designed to focus on and secure an interest in Pliny as orator” (2003: 229). Pliny’s concerns and frustrations as both an orator and a poet, in fact, as a *vir*
bonus in general, permeate his letters and force us to re-examine their influence on contemporary literary society, an influence recognized by Elaine Fantham (1996: 210–11) as steadily increasing throughout the various manifestations of the letters as a literary work. A letter from Book 8 may illuminate both the perception of modern oratory in Pliny’s letters and the influence of these letters on the Dialogus.

Ep. 8.7, addressed to Tacitus, begins, Neque ut magistro magister neque ut discipulo discipulus (sic enim scribis), sed ut discipulo magister (nam tu magister, ego contra; atque adeo tu in scholam revocas, ego adhuc Saturnalia extendo) librum misisti (“You have sent me your book notas teacher to teacher, nor as student to student (for thus you write), but as teacher to student (for you are the teacher, I the student; and so you are calling me back to school, and I am still enjoying my winter holiday)...”). Sherwin-White, based on 7.20, assumes this to be the second roll of the Histories. But the wording requires closer examination.

Why would Pliny open a letter claiming to have received a book of Histories with such a long assertion that Tacitus is his teacher? As Syme points out, “The volume in question should therefore be either an oration or a treatise on oratory” (1958: 1.113). The phrasing used by Pliny seems far more appropriate to the Dialogus, which answers some of the questions raised by Pliny in Ep. 1.20. The phrase tu in scholam revocas indicates quite clearly that Pliny is being called back to school. This closely resembles the language used by the elder Seneca in the opening of his Controversiae (mittatur senex in scholas), further indicating that the work is a treatise on oratory.28 Messalla, when he is praising his friends for their literary efforts, reproaches Aper, since nondum ab scholasticis controversiis recessit et otium suum mavult novorum rhetorum more quam veterum oratorum consumere (“not yet has he withdrawn from schoolhouse controversiae and he prefers to spend his leisure time in the manner of the new rhetoricians rather than that of the old orators”) (14.4). More importantly, Aper ends the Dialogus by claiming he will accuse Maternus and Secundus before the rhetoribus et scholasticis. It seems entirely possible, therefore, that even if the book referenced in 7.20 was a section of the Histories and not the Dialogus, Tacitus was invited in writing the Histories, as Murgia and Syme suggest, to revisit the themes of the Dialogus. Upon revisiting these themes, Tacitus revised the Dialogus itself and sent the revised version to Pliny, who then referenced it in his last book of letters.

Perhaps as a final point of reference between the content of the Dialogus and Pliny’s letters, it might be mentioned that Pliny envisioned himself as emulating Cicero, not only as an orator, but also as a poet, and perhaps most importantly for modern scholars, as an epistolographer. The one Ciceronian genre he left untried was the treatise, and in particular, the dialogue. In the Dialogus Messalla, upon discovering his friends in such an animated discussion, fears he has interrupted

28. Hass-von Reitzenstein 1970: 14 notes a further similarity between the Dialogus and the preface to the Controversiae in that the dedications of both works protest that the work is being written as a response to someone else’s questions.
some *secretum consilium*. When his friends explain the topic of the debate, he declares:

id ipsum delectat, quod vos, viri optimi et <optimi> temporum nostrorum oratores, non forensibus tantum negotiis et declamatorio studio ingenia vestra exercetis, sed eius modi etiam disputationes assumitis quae et ingenium alunt et eruditionis ac litterarum iucundissimum oblectamentum cum vobis qui illa disputatis adferunt, tum etiam iis ad quorum aures pervenerint.

14.3

This itself delights me, namely that you, the best men and the best orators of our times, are plying your talents not only in the business of the forum and the pursuit of declamation, but you even take up debates of the sort which nourish the talent and provide the most pleasant delight in learning and letters both among yourselves who debate these things, and also among those to whose ears these discussions come.

Thus Tacitus seems, through Messalla, to be expressing his respect for Ciceronian dialogues, and offering them as an alternative genre for modern eloquence.

CONCLUSIONS

In the *Dialogus*, Aper argues that Maternus should not be writing poetry since he is capable of respectable oratory. Aper claims that poetry is suitable for those who have no talent for the forum, but that men who are eloquent orators should throw all their energy into that pursuit. Williams takes this one step further by stating, “It is useless, Aper’s point is, for an orator who thinks he recognizes the obsolescence of oratory to compensate by taking up poetry. That this was hitting at a real target of A.D. 102 can be seen from Pliny’s letters” (1978: 48). Indeed, Pliny openly addresses this issue several times. In *Ep*. 4.14, Pliny sends a book of his poems to Paternus and asks for his honest opinion, telling him he will not take the criticism too harshly. *Nam si hoc opusculum nostrum aut potissimum esset aut solum fortasse posset durum videri dicere “quaere quod agas”; molle et humanum est: “habes quod agas”* (“For if this little work of ours were our only or most important one, perhaps it could seem harsh to say, ‘find something else to do’; but instead it is mild and humane to tell me ‘you have something else to do’”) (4.14.10). Likewise, Pliny’s defense of his verses often falls back on the examples of ancient orators. Pliny claims that great men of earlier eras such as Cicero and Caesar had spent their *otium* in the same pursuit (see esp. *Ep.* 5.3).29 Aper, of course, ridicules this practice in the *Dialogus* (21.6).

29. On Pliny as poet, see Gamberini 1983: 92–109, where Gamberini studies Pliny’s definition of poetry as both *otium* and *negotium*—*otium* for Pliny himself, but *negotium*, as far as Pliny was concerned, for others of greater literary merit.
In Ep. 9.10 Pliny states that he is unable to follow Tacitus’ advice to cultivate Minerva and Diana equally. He finds there to be a shortage of boars. At the same time, Pliny is also unable to write poetry in the very locus amoenus which should provide him with inspiration. By contrast, he revises some speeches, but considers this type of labor inamoenum. Pliny’s letter implies a lack of material for both oratory and poetry. Not only is great oratory spurred on by internal struggles within the government, great poetry is also inspired by a turbulent environment. Statius and Martial thrived under Domitian, but the “Golden Age” of Trajan produced no great poet laureate.

Pliny’s lament over the lack of material reminds us of the resignation of Maternus at the end of the Dialogus. In fact, Pliny’s complaint in Ep. 3.20.12 that he has no real news to report since sunt quidem cuncta sub unius arbitrio, qui pro utilitate communi solus omnium curas laboresque suscepit... (“indeed, all things are under the rule of one man, who alone undertakes the cares and labors of all for the common benefit...”) parallels Maternus’ speech at the end of the dialogue which concludes with the assertion that there is no need for public debate either in the contiones apud populum or in the senate, cum de Republica non imperiti et multi deliberent, sed sapientissimus et unus (“since those deliberating about public affairs are not the inexperienced and the many, but rather the wisest and the one”) (Dial. 41.4). As Gamberini points out, Pliny’s desire to write letters like Cicero’s “reveals Pliny’s melancholy yearning for the political issues of the past (yearning which, however, does not result in an anachronistic defence of Republican freedom)” (1983: 169–70).

While Nerva may have granted amnesty to many delatores (see esp. Ep. 4.22), there were still battles worth fighting shortly after the death of Domitian. Pliny and Tacitus both bear witness to the power of skilled oratory in dealing with the corruption which had set in under Domitian’s reign of terror. Pliny, like Cicero and Aper, seems willing to defend modern oratory against its detractors. In Ep. 6.11, he celebrates the entry into public life of two up-and-coming orators. At Ep. 6.33.1, he celebrates his most recent work, stating, nam mihi satis est certare mecum (“it is enough for me to vie with myself”). At Ep. 8.3.2, he tells Julius Sparsus, volo enim proxima quaeque absolutissima videri (“I generally want my latest work to be seen as the most accomplished”), indicating that he believed himself to be constantly improving. Most particularly, Pliny celebrates his own Panegyricus of Trajan in Ep. 3.18, stating that the fact that his friends were willing to listen to the entire speech is an indication that oratory “which was nearly extinct is reviving” (quae prope extincta refoventur) (3.18.6).

30. Likewise in Ep. 9.15 he complains that he is unwillingly editing some actioeculae.
32. Regarding Pliny’s increasing awareness of his lack of material, Morello notes (2003: 208–209) that Book 9 seems particularly concerned with establishing Pliny’s literary reputation and advertising his connections. See also Mayer 2003 and Gamberini 1983: 70–71 on Pliny’s insecurity about his literary legacy.
But despite Pliny’s best efforts to celebrate modern oratory, he recognized the problems facing the modern orator, the same problems discussed in the *Dialogus*. In *Ep.* 2.14, Pliny laments the use of professional claque in the Centumviral court as a sign that oratory is on the decline, a trend first noticed by Domitius Afer in the previous generation. Pliny states, *quod alioqui perire incipiebat cum perisse Afro videretur, nunc vero prope funditus extinctum et eversum est* (“What was beginning to perish then, when it seemed to Afer to have already perished, now indeed is almost entirely extinguished and overturned”) (2.14.12).

Maternus makes the same complaint in the *Dialogus*, stating that nowadays, *oratori autem clamore plausuque opus est* (“the orator needs applause and shouts of approval”) (39.4). Pliny likewise laments the death of his enemy Regulus because *habebat studiis honorem* (*Ep.* 6.2.2), claiming in particular that while Regulus was alive, there were fewer constraints on the time allowed to speakers, echoing the sentiments expressed by Maternus in *Dial.* 19. The issues faced by Pliny and Tacitus in the age of Trajan were not unlike those discussed by the interlocutors of the *Dialogus* in the age of Vespasian.

Despite the importance of these issues, the letters from Pliny to Tacitus on boar hunting reveal the same tone of light-heartedness as the *Dialogus*, in which, as Mayer noted, “The essential feature of the conversation is that all of the speakers are friends, and the tone of their discourse is respectful, however candid” (2001: 47). Indeed, Maternus ends with the sentiment that regarding the struggle between ancient and modern orators, *ac deus aliquis vitas vestras ac tempora repente mutasset, nec vobis summa illa laus et gloria in eloquentia neque illis modus et temperamentum defuisset* (“and if some god had suddenly exchanged your lives and times, neither the highest praise and glory in eloquence would have been lacking for you, nor measure and moderation for them”) (41.5). Maternus, like Pliny, sees that a true comparison cannot be made between ancient and modern oratory.

In his final letter addressed to Tacitus, *Ep.* 9.14, Pliny links his literary legacy to that of Tacitus, as he does in *Ep.* 7.20, stating, *pergamus modo itinere instituto, quod ut paucus in lucem famamque provexit, ita multos e tenebris et silentio protulit* (“Let us now hasten on the path undertaken, which, as it has carried a few to brilliance and fame, thus it also has brought many out of darkness and silence”). Pliny sees himself and Tacitus not only as great authors, but also as great teachers, not unlike the elder statesmen a young Tacitus observed in the *Dialogus*. As Winterbottom recognizes, at the end of the *Dialogus*, “The little scene is redolent of the life lived by Pliny and his friends, cultured, rather earnest, supremely conscious of its blessings. Did Tacitus really see his own age so differently?” (2001: 154). Probably not.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY


